1: Raswan T-3 (1913-35) 1947 MD4 Rwala
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212 "Then dost thou at least know the signature of thy *sheykh* and the seal of Amir Fuaz?"

Before his men, the Fid'an dared not admit that this too was beyond him, so I asked for the pouch Ali used to carry on his body, containing the letter along with other treasures.

Everybody listened respectfully to Ali's reading of the letter. He read judiciously—only what was pleasant and polite; all the rest he left out. The rascals hung on Ali's lips and drank in every word that came from them. When he had finished reading and had kissed the signature and the seal, the men pressed round him and inspected with awe the astounding document; and ignorant as they were of writing, they looked at it upside down!

685 626 The *Akid* was visibly uneasy, and for a while he and the others put their heads together and, after much gesticulation and muttering, he turned to Ali and me and fired a cross-examination of silly questions at us. At last he seemed convinced that we had been wrongly treated, and he ordered his men to return our belongings to us. This naturally caused a small revolution, but the *Akid* knew how to make his influence felt, and after each of the men had in turn exhausted his protests against such a breach of the honour and the good customs of noble raiders, all our property was actually returned to us, with the exception only of my wrist watch, which still remained on the arm of the leader. Ali noticed it and, greatly daring, cried out: "Through thee the faith of thy *sheykh* is blackened! Divest thyself of our property, if thou art our friend." The *Akid*

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meekly handed over the watch, which Ali put on his own wrist. "Let me take care of it for thee," he said to me, in his protective manner. He is actually "taking care" of my watch to this very day!

Our Fid'an hosts numbered seventeen horsemen and eight camel-riders, who had come on the scene after the attack on us. A gang of typical desert outlaws.

At the evening meal they spread a large leather camel-saddle cover for a tablecloth. Previously the dough for our bread had been kneaded on it. At other times it served as manger and watering-trough for the horses and camels, for it could be suspended by leather loops, one at each of the four corners.

The *Akid* poured sour camels' milk from a goat skin into a wooden basin and handed it round. The few *dhaluls* were lying close to us. The red campfire threw a glow of light over them and their long shadows melted into the blackness of the night. For a moment I imagined myself surrounded by strange monsters.

When I closed my eyes and heard only the belching and grunting of my table-companions, I could scarcely distinguish them from the camels chewing the cud. And Ali was the noisiest feeder of them all!

Next morning the Fid'ans proposed that they should join us with the idea of entering Ruala territory and lifting some camels. Nothing remained for Ali and myself but to make the best of these unwelcome proposals. We had to endure their company in the pious hope that somewhere we should fall in with the Ruala Bedouins.

Two days later we camped at the well of Al-Hajal,

further than this, for none of them wishes to get a reputation for being a quarrelsome or trying companion, and so, when there is anything to do, they all jump up and offer to do it, whether it is to look for a camel, gather wood, or make coffee. Their life is ruled by conventions, and public opinion sees to it that these conventions are observed. In the desert there is no privacy. Every action is seen, and you might say every word is overheard, for they always live crowded together for safety; in any case, they are the most observant people in the world, and everything that happens, however trivial, is noted and later repeated and discussed, so that something which a man has said or done on the coast of the Persian Gulf will be spoken of months later, hundreds of miles away on the borders of the Yaman.

Another difference between Badu and villagers is the way they treat their animals. No Badui would ever knock his camel about; it is far too precious, and in any case he is much too deeply attached to it. You will often see him fondling and kissing his camel, and he will generally be hunting round for titbits for it. Badui, indeed, will always sacrifice their own comfort to that of their animals. Some years ago, when we arrived in the Hadhramaut out of the desert, I remember the enormous meals which were provided for us, such as my always hungry companions cannot even have dreamed of; yet next day they were frantic to get back to the desert where there would be proper grazing for their animals. Sometimes, looking at a wonderful view, I have said to a Badui, "Isn't that lovely?" and he has looked round for a bit and answered, "No, it is rotten bad grazing," and he saw nothing else, whereas if he had been a Persian he would have rhapsodized over it.

Yet they are passionately fond of poetry. They are a noisy, talkative race. I think many of them would find it as hard to stop talking as a heavy smoker to stop smoking, but they will sit for hours in silence if someone is reciting poetry. They are also deeply religious, and in their hard lives they derive at all times a profound comfort from their faith. Townsmen often scoff at them and say that they are little better than pagans because they do not observe all the ritual of Islam and are sometimes lax over their prayers and fasting, but you cannot be with them without realizing what an integral part of their everyday lives their religion is. A Rashdi once described to me how alone he had crossed the trackless wastes of the Eastern sands for 450 waterless miles. Astounded that anyone should have ventured on such a journey unaccompanied, I asked him, "Do you really mean that you were by yourself?" and he answered me quite simply, "God was my companion."

The Badu are the product of their environment, and it is the constant struggle for survival which has fashioned them as they are. Security is unknown to them and their rewards are at all times pitifully small. At any moment drought, disease, or raiders may sweep their herds away. Yet, tempered from childhood by wind and sun, they face life unflinchingly. In this harsh and barren land the desert lad mates only with the desert maid, for who else would share the Badu's couch among the wind-blown sand? For centuries they have guarded the purity of their blood with the dagger, and they are fine-drawn, highly strung, and unstable as thoroughbreds.